

9. Implications for Understanding Religion, Secularity, and Conflict

Introduction

In the chapter on theory and methodology, I placed this thesis squarely in the “overarching view” category – it is meant to give a broad perspective, not specific practical measures. Even the previous, concluding chapter only contained relatively abstract points, not specific directions. Obviously, then, the next step is to provide those. To demonstrate the applicability of this theory to practical situations, in this chapter I will discuss two contemporary issues that face the society of the United States and directly concern the religio-secular divide. The first is the war on terror, and the second is the role of religion in American public life, particularly in public schools. In the first example, an analysis of secularity is important because, while one can debate the extent to which the “West” is secular, many people’s responses to what they believe to be religious violence are influenced by various secular perspectives as I have defined them. In the second example, I directly address the religio-secular divide in one Western country, and assess the tensions that arise as social and cultural conflict. The end of this chapter will return to a more abstract perspective, and will discuss future research directions both generally and more specifically within peace studies.

In the previous chapter, I said that in approaching the individual intolerant person, this thesis can not do much. The best I can suggest is that one find someone more amenable from the same religion as the person with whom one has a conflict, and hope that they can mediate. Otherwise, other techniques from the field of conflict resolution, on fostering communication, are more applicable. Likewise, this thesis has only moderate import for dealing with small groups. Strong, open secularity will not necessarily convince people of the benefits of strong, open religion. It is on the large, social scale that I believe this thesis is most important. By promoting strong, open secularity and encouraging strong, open religion on a wide scale, one can create space

for moderate, peace-loving people of all worldviews to work and strengthen and open their own groups. This can help defuse the rhetoric that legitimizes violence and can promote peaceful alternatives. I must adamantly state, though, that any such approach will not work – indeed, it would be hypocritical or worse – if professed without accompanying and widespread commitment to peaceful *behavior* by secular actors and societies. If professed without addressing the many social and political inequalities of the world, there will be no end to conflict. More important than just strong and open, only peaceful secularity will encourage peaceful religion – peaceful, as defined in the third chapter, as beneficial to all. Should secular-derived policies remain unpeaceful, unbeneficial to some, the best that one can hope for is a nonviolent response to the conflict that this would inevitably create, but struggles against injustice would not and should not stop.

Applying Strong-Open Secularity

The West and the War on Terror

I have scrupulously avoided a treatment of the “war on terror”¹ until this point because this thesis is not about either terrorism or Islam. However, with all that has been written about terrorism and religion since September 11th, 2001, let alone in the years previous, there is more than enough material to analyze. I will limit this particular discussion to material dated through the first anniversary of the September 11th attacks. This is partly to limit the number of sources, and also because by late 2002 the possibility of a United States invasion of Iraq was looming, which involved a whole host of issues not strictly related to religion. More generally, I will not here discuss the tactics of confronting terrorists, religious or otherwise, as that discussion would involve a number of topics more adequately addressed by other branches of peace studies.

1 I use this term because it is commonly used by Western media. However, it is vastly overbroad – terror is an amorphous concept, not a specific target on which one could possibly declare war. While a “war on terrorism” would also be wide-ranging, at least terrorism can be defined as the use of terror as a tool in conflict, a behavior that can, at least in theory, be observed and opposed. Unfortunately, “terror” is more often cited as the enemy than “terrorism.”

Rather, the central issues that concern strong-open secularity are to what extent Islam is a factor in terrorism, and how different answers to that question affect policy toward Muslim societies.²

On this question, the different secular viewpoints I outlined above have been quite visible in the Western media, particularly on the editorial pages. Richard Dawkins, reliably, railed against religion. In one article, he explained how, if one wanted to make an inexpensive guided missile, one could use people to guide planes into buildings – but only if one could overcome the very rational conclusion by those people that this would kill them. The concept of an afterlife would overcome this, for, Dawkins argues, religion encourages one to devalue one’s own life because of the belief that death is not the end of it. Because of this, the mere presence of religion and its concomitant beliefs in the afterlife “is like littering the streets with loaded guns. Do not be surprised if they are used.”³ Soon after, Dawkins explored how religion becomes justification for using such weapons. “The human psyche has two great sicknesses: the urge to carry vendetta across generations, and the tendency to fasten group labels on people rather than see them as individuals. Religion fuels both. All violent enmities in the world today fuel their tanks at this holy gas-station.”⁴ He does this without recognizing that he is doing the same things, such as tarring all people who have any religious belief with a very, very broad brush. There is no recognition that many people reject the use of violence and do so for religious reasons, or even that religion could be anything other than – to cobble together some of his adjectives – childish, delusional belief in imaginary beings.

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- 2 On the topic of whether Muslims generally, or bin Laden and al Qaeda specifically, were responsible for the attacks, while there may not have been absolute proof of their guilt, there was more than enough circumstantial evidence, notably in the form of repeated declarations of intent, to make confronting them a worthwhile goal. And even if, although I do not believe it to be the case, bin Laden et al. were not responsible but some nefarious party wanted to make it appear to be so in the service of some other end, it would still require much unresolved tension between the broad groups of “the Muslim world” and “the West,” and so this thesis still pertains.
 - 3 Dawkins, Richard, 2001, “Religion’s Misguided Missiles,” *The Guardian* (UK), 15 Sep., <www.guardian.co.uk/wtccrash/story/0,1300,552388,00.html> (as on 25 Jan. 2005).
 - 4 Dawkins, Richard, 2001, “Time to Stand Up,” paper delivered to the Freedom from Religion Foundation (by James Coors in lieu of Dawkins) (US), Sep., <www.simonyi.ox.ac.uk/dawkins/WorldOfDawkins-archive/Dawkins/Work/Articles/2001-09time_to_stand_up.shtml> (as on 25 Jan. 2005).

Fortunately, Western governments have generally not turned to such analyses to form policy, because launching diatribes full of scorn and malice is probably not the best way to begin a process of peacemaking.

However, Dawkins and those who took a similar stance ask an important question: to what extent does Islam play a role in current affairs? Some of a more liberal secular bent felt that it was, indeed, a matter of concern. Lamenting Western insistence, particularly by governments, that “this is not a war on Islam,” Salman Rushdie directly implicated forms of Islamic belief in the September 11th attacks. However, his position was that it was extremism, not Islam itself, that was to blame, and said that Muslim societies must adopt wholesale the “secularist-humanist principles on which the modern world is based” for terrorism to end.⁵ In my terms, these would be or secular or secular-humanist principles – rather more liberal than “secularist” – which is apparent when reading his article. Andrew Sullivan took a more moderate view of such secularization, insisting that secularity is the best place for religious – including Islamic – freedom. For him, the war on terror was a defense of religious freedom against extremism as expressed in one religion, and that the conflict was “fighting for religion against one of the deepest strains in religion there is.”⁶

On the other hand, the liberal secular tendency to ignore religion entirely was also in evidence, particularly in governments. George W. Bush – his ill-chosen “crusade” terminology aside – was quick to declare that the United States’ response was not a war on Islam, whatever the beliefs and intentions of al Qaeda. He also met with American Muslim leaders to emphasize this. However, it appears that the United States government’s actual engagement with Islamic thought was relatively limited. In Bob Woodward’s *Bush at War*, a thorough look at the first few months of the “war on terror” and the Afghanistan campaign, one finds very few references to Islam as a belief system.

5 Rushdie, Salman, 2001, “Yes, This Is about Islam,” *The New York Times* (US), 2 Nov., sec. A, p. 25, c. 1.

6 Sullivan, Andrew, 2001, “This Is a Religious War,” *The New York Times Magazine* (US), 7 Oct., sec. 6, p. 44, c. 3.

Only slightly more frequently does it appear as a social descriptor. Moreover, where Bush and his counselors do address Islam, it is often in the context of public relations or propaganda needs.⁷ This is an example of the liberal secular tendency to instrumentalize religion, to see it as, in Fred Halliday's terms, an à la carte selection of texts and practices that one can easily reinterpret for political ends.⁸ Of course, neither this nor the liberal view of secularity as a place for depoliticized religion is open enough to truly engage with religious belief, which is necessary for any engagement with Muslim societies to begin.

Postmodernist seculars were also in evidence, although many people saw September 11th as "the end of (postmodern) irony." Indeed, on the popular front the most substantial postmodern debate was whether George W. Bush was correct to call suicide bombers cowards when – from a certain point of view – their actions were brave, even heroic. However, Stanley Fish presented a more cogent critique of the accepted understanding of the attackers. Starting from the debate on how to describe the attackers, Fish argued that whether or not one agrees with al Qaeda, one gains little and loses much by belittling them. Rather than seeing them only as cowardly or evil, one must recognize that al Qaeda had both an identifiable motive and a rational plan, the better to anticipate and counter them.⁹ However, Fish argued against the possibility that this recognition *of* the other could become engagement *with* them. One could condemn the actions of extremists, even propose what Muslims generally might do to wrest Islam from such interpreters, but "there you have to leave it."¹⁰ Because, as Fish contends, there is no absolute way for seculars to prove to Muslims that their proposals are correct, it would seem that there is no reason to even try. With such an attitude,

7 Woodward, Bob, 2002, *Bush at War* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster), p. 76 and 279.

8 Halliday, Fred, 1996, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (London, UK: Tauris), p. 114.

9 Fish, Stanley, 2001, "Condemnation Without Absolutes," *The New York Times* (US), 15 Oct.

10 Fish, Stanley, 2002, "Postmodern Warfare: The Ignorance of Our Warrior Intellectuals," *Harper's Magazine* (US), July, <www.findarticles.com/cf_dls/m1111/1826_305/88998669/p1/article.jhtml> (as on 25 Jan. 2005).

engagement is impossible.

None of the above perspectives were truly strong-open. The policies that stem from them would fail to engage with the Muslim world, each in a different way. The secularist approaches fail because they take issue with religion itself. Liberal secular ones either ignore religion or engage only with those elements that fit comfortably into a liberal perspective. Finally, postmodern secularity fails because it does not go beyond recognizing difference to truly bridging it. Of course, the categories of secularity I have identified are ideal types. No one person would always adhere to such clear-cut positions, and so in this analysis I am labeling the particular attitudes evinced in specific passages, not people themselves, according to these types. Rushdie, Sullivan, Bush, Fish – even Dawkins – would each undoubtedly present a more complex understanding in a fuller discussion. However, judging from the passages presented here, none of these is truly strong *and* open. What, then, would a strong-open view of the role of religion in the “war on terror” entail, and how would it affect policy?

The first question to address is, what is Islam’s role in justifying the attacks? To understand this, one should analyze bin Laden’s words, not because he represents Muslims as a whole, but because he appeals to certain needs felt by many people, both in the Muslim world and outside it. His rhetoric thus leads some people to actively and many more to passively support him. A good place to start is with a foundation document of al Qaeda, bin Laden and others’ declaration of “Jihad against Jews and Crusaders.”¹¹ In this short piece, bin Laden and his cofounders lay out their grievances with the United States: the presence of “American” troops in Saudi Arabia and its influence in Riyadh; their use of Saudi bases to bomb Iraqis (in the 1990s); and United

11 bin Laden, Osama; al-Zawahiri, Ayman; Taha, Abu-Yasir Rifa’i Ahmad; Hamzah, Mir, Rahman, Fazlul, 1998, “Nass Bayan al-Jabhah al-Islamiyah al-Alamiyah li-Jihad al-Yahud wa-al-Salibiyyin” (“Declaraton of the World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders”), *al-Quds al-Arabi* (UK) 9(2732), 23 Feb.: 3, <data.alquds.co.uk/Alquds/1998/02Feb/23%2520Feb%2520Mon/QudsPage03.pdf>. Cornell University Library hosts an English translation and a photocopy of the original at <www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/wif.htm> and <[.fatw2.htm](http://fatw2.htm)>, respectively. All web addresses current on 25 Jan. 2005.

States support for Israel against Palestinians. Bin Laden and his partners argue that by Islamic law when Muslims anywhere are attacked, it is the duty of Muslims everywhere to strike back. In this case, they believe that law requires Muslims to kill “Americans” and their allies, both military and civilian, wherever possible. This statement was presented in highly religious language, with references to Islamic teachings throughout.

Secularists oppose bin Laden because his message is religious. As Mohammed Hafez ably argues, violence in the Muslim world is not directly caused by deprivation or failed modernization, but is “a defensive reaction to predatory state repression.”¹² Thus, in supporting regimes that violently repress Islamist politicians, secularists not only ignore their message, but also foster the grievances that directly contribute to violence. Nor is Islamists’ political religion just a rhetorical tool they use to motivate Muslims for expressly worldly ends. I can not speak for bin Laden’s personal belief, but his appeal is not just instrumental. One may disagree with his methods, but he is presenting political arguments, although not in secular terms. To ignore the religious language and treat only the political aspects, as a liberal secular might, deprives one of the means of fully engaging with the wider Muslim community for whom that language may mean a great deal. Finally, although bin Laden himself is an extremist, most of the Muslim world is not. Extremist Islam appeals because it purports to address the concerns of Muslims in a way that secular answers have not, not because there exists some inherent Islamic perspective, as per the postmodern secular position. A strong-open secular approach would be to, first, oppose the use of violence by all parties. Second, one must understand, as well as possible, the grievances to which bin Laden appeals and address them. This is not because those grievances directly cause the violence, but because they speak to the broader Muslim community. One must thus remain open to the concerns of Muslims, howsoever presented, and not treat differences as evidence of an unbridgeable gap.

12 Hafez, Mohammed M., 2003, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner), p. xvi.

Such an approach would connect with strong-open Muslims. While names like Tariq Ramadan or Irshad Manji may be more well-known to the West, there are many such Muslims, both in the West and in the Muslim world. After September 11th, Faisal Bodi¹³ in the UK and Tariq Rahman in Pakistan,¹⁴ among others, argued that many Muslims, even many extremists, were not against modernity, secularity, or the West as such. Rather, they see many modernization attempts, both by the West and by local elites, as Westernization or secularization. Muslim moderates find themselves in a terrible bind: they can modernize in a largely secular and Western fashion, or stay true to Islam, the self-identified defenders of which are extremists. What they wanted was the intellectual space to combat Muslim extremism on Muslim terms, and so modernize Islam from within instead of importing foreign ways. For that, they need to engage with, and not be dictated to by, seculars. As mentioned in the last chapter, the important difference here is between adaptation and adoption. There will always be Muslim extremists, as there will always be radicals of every type, but without the social support they find in confronting a monolithic “West,” they will no longer be a significant, international threat. Moreover, shifting to a strong-open approach need not appear to be weakness in the face of terrorism – the strength of this approach still requires denouncing and confronting terrorist tactics.

Fortunately, there is much space for such an approach in secularity. Academic works like François Burgat’s *Face to Face with Political Islam* have explored the real complexity of Islamist groups, noting how most such parties, given the choice, will eschew extremism when able to participate in government.¹⁵ Nor, as may unfortunately be likely in an increasingly polarized political climate in the United States, should one see such a position as “liberal.” Many self-identified conservatives, such as Ralph

13 Bodi, Faisal, 2001, “Of Course It’s a War on Islam,” *The Guardian* (UK), 17 Oct., <www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,575563,00.html> (as on 25 Jan. 2005).

14 Rahman, Tariq, 2001, “A Nightmare World,” *The News International* (PK), 19 Oct.

15 Burgat, François, 2003, *Face to Face with Political Islam*, “2002 ed.” (1st 1996) (London, UK: I.B. Tauris). See particularly the preface and concluding chapters.

Peters, share this willingness to better understand the role of Islam in the world. Peters specifically and wisely suggests looking beyond Islam's Arab "heartland" and engaging also its dynamic "frontiers" in Asia, Africa, and the West.¹⁶ Peters was also highly appreciative of Bill Clinton's speech at the US-Islamic World Forum in early 2004,¹⁷ which I regard as one of the best presentations of a simple, strong-open program. There, Clinton made four cogent points, applying each equally to the United States and the Islamic World:

We need to do more to understand how the two major players here understand each other.

We need, secondly, to improve our capacity for self-criticism.

Third, we need to identify our common interests.

And, fourth, we need to build the habits of mind and heart necessary to end the habit of demonizing those who are different from us.¹⁸

Here, succinctly, are represented both an open strength – to understand and critically engage with both yourself and others – and a strong openness – to work together even across differences.

Religion and Public Schooling in the United States

And yet, casting the United States as a representative of secularity is misleading. While the foreign policy of that country has largely been liberal secular, as shown by the examples I have given in this thesis, there is a great deal of domestic dispute concerning the role of religion in public life. Indeed, while some saw September 11th as part of a conflict between Islam and the West, others saw it as part of a conflict between secularity and Christianity in the United States. Appearing on *The 700 Club*, Jerry Falwell implicated those who have sought to "[throw] God out of the public square" and

16 Peters, Ralph, 2002, "Rolling Back Radical Islam," *Parameters*, aut.: 4-16.

17 Peters, Ralph, 2004, "Clinton's Triumph," *The New York Post* (US), 19 Jan. I include this speech despite its late date because, as Peters notes, Clinton specifically avoided talking about Iraq.

18 Clinton, William J., 2004, *US-Islamic World Forum Closing Address*, Doha, Qatar, 12 Jan., <www.brook.edu/fp/research/projects/islam/clinton20040112.pdf>, p. 4. A video is available at <www.us-islamicworldforum.org/content/multimedia.html>. Both web addresses current on 25 Jan. 2005.

so angered Him. Falwell charged “all of [those] who have tried to secularize America – I point the finger in their face and say, “You helped this happen.””¹⁹ While most conservatives denounced this statement and Falwell quickly rescinded it, it still indicates a major social conflict in the United States. It was said by a prominent minister, chancellor of a major conservative Christian university, on the nationwide Christian Broadcasting Network. The leading figure of that network, Pat Robertson, has also long argued that many modern social ills are caused by secularization and the removal of God from the public square.²⁰ Thus, I will now look at how a strong-open secularity can help resolve conflicts concerning the role of religion in the United States. Particularly, I will look at the issue of religion in public schools, as this is a narrow enough topic for a short treatment yet includes a range of factors. Two notable sub-issues are the presence of religious observance – namely, prayer – as well as matters of belief – here, creationism – in public institutions.

Given that this example deals with United States institutions, the natural touchstone for any discussion is the Constitution. The “establishment clause” of the first amendment in the Bill of Rights reads, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Like much of the Constitution, this is broadly worded, leaving a fair amount of room for interpretation. A common interpretation is that the Constitution mandates a “wall of separation between church and state.” However, this phrase that does not appear in the Constitution, but rather in a letter of Thomas Jefferson, dated 1 January 1802. Jefferson there argued that he could not, as President, designate days of prayer because the Constitution erected such a wall in the first amendment. While this was consistent with Jefferson’s overall attitude towards the role of government, which he always sought to limit, it was not consistent with the “strict construction” approach to the Constitution by which he

19 Falwell, Jerry, 2001, comments on *The 700 Club*, 13 Sep.

20 Gaddy, Barbara B.; Hall, T. William; and Marzano, Robert J., 1996, *School Wars: Resolving our Conflicts over Religion and Values* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass), p. 39.

normally pursued this end. Strict construction limits the powers of government to those explicitly granted in the Constitution. However, in delineating a “wall of separation,” Jefferson was calling for more than the Constitution specified.

Nonetheless, for the first 125 years or so of their existence, United States public schools contained explicitly religious practices. For example, teachers might lead pupils in prayers or Bible reading as part of the official structure of the day. It was not until the 1960s that the Supreme Court ruled against such practices. Three famous rulings, *Engle v. Vitale* (1962), *Abington School District v. Schempp* (1963), and *Murray v. Curlett* (1963), together banned such overt religious practices. Since then, Supreme Court rulings in *Lee v. Weisman* (1992) and *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe* (2000) have extended this prohibition to extracurricular but still school-sponsored activities, specifically graduation ceremonies and sporting events. However, Supreme Court decisions from *Zorach v. Clauson* (1952) to *Board of Education of Westside Community Schools v. Mergens* (1990) have found that public schools may make space for religious observance on the part of students, provided that it is not a school function. The latter decision specifically upheld the *Equal Access Act* of 1984, which required that, if a school allows student-run clubs at all, it must allow religious clubs to operate on school property.

In terms of the religious content of public education the United States has had fewer high court decisions but an equally complex social history. Particularly important in this history is the ongoing conflict between proponents of evolution and those of creationism. The former, as a scientific theory, has come to symbolize the teaching of science as a whole. The latter, generally understood to be belief in the creation of the world as related in the Bible, thus represents the teaching of all religious belief. Although well known, *The State of Tennessee v. Scopes*, the “Scopes Monkey Trial,” of 1925 did not produce a clear decision. After much rhetoric and debate, a local court did convict John Scopes of teaching evolutionary theory in violation of Tennessee law,

which specifically prohibited the teaching of anything that contradicted creationism. However, the court only imposed a medium fine, and this was overturned on appeal. By the 1950s and 1960s educational standards had generally moved toward favoring evolutionary theory without the necessity for further legal challenges. Yet the issue was not settled, and the 1960s and 1970s saw the development of “creation science” as a competing scientific theory that would bring creationism back into the schools. Thus, it was not until the 1980s that the Supreme Court heard a creation-evolution case. The ruling in *Edwards v. Aguillard* (1987) struck down a Louisiana law requiring that creationism be given equal time with evolution in science classes. The decision held that creationism was a religious, not a scientific, belief, and thus teaching any theory that supported it was establishment. Thus, the current legal standard of the United States concerning religion in public schools allows for equal access for religious as well as secular student groups to school resources, but prohibits school functions that include a religious element, let alone the teaching of any generally religious doctrine.²¹

This situation is not pleasing to all. Certain religious groups continue to press for prayer and creationism to have a greater presence in public schools. What, then, would a strong-open secular response to such groups be? First, it is worth briefly reviewing other secular responses. Secularist groups would welcome the conflict because they also oppose the status quo – any religion is too much. Two such groups are the American Atheists, founded by Madalyn Murray O’Hair of the *Murray v. Curlett* case, and the “Brights” movement, a more amorphous group aimed at promoting the interests of people with a naturalistic worldview.²² Liberal seculars, on the other hand, may favor

21 *Elk Grove Unified School District v. Newdow* (2004) notwithstanding. The Supreme Court ruled that Michael Newdow did not have the standing to represent his daughter concerning whether she be required to recite the Pledge of Allegiance as it stands, containing the words “under God.” Thus, the Court avoided the issue of the Constitutionality of the words in an official United States symbol. In any event, *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* (1943) already holds that it is unconstitutional to force students to recite the Pledge, so challenges to the text of the Pledge are not likely to be heard by the Supreme Court in relation to schooling. All of this leaves alone the United States motto, “In God We Trust,” established by Congress in 1956 although appearing on coinage since the 1860s.

22 American Atheists, <www.atheists.org/>; Brights, <the-brights.net/> (as on 25 Jan. 2005).

the status quo. They would agree that attempts to put creationism on science curricula essentially seek to slip religion in through the “back door.” Stephen Jay Gould spends roughly one quarter of *Rocks of Ages* discussing *Edwards v. Agillard*, at which he testified to this.²³ Liberal seculars would not, however, oppose equal access. From a postmodern secular perspective, it may be impossible to justify keeping religion out of public education at all, at least due to any perceived value-neutrality of such a position. Indeed, this is one of Fish’s most cogent observations, but he goes beyond it to argue that religious people must inherently oppose any moderation of the role of religion in public institutions because each religion must proclaim its truth as the highest.²⁴ Thus, extreme postmodern secularity may also welcome conflict as evidence of difference, but with no real direction for resolution.

However, given that conflicts over schools are a very personal, local issue, it is reasonable to assume that a secular person would share much with his or her religious counterparts. Indeed, this is what Alan Wolfe argues in *The Transformation of American Religion*. He shows that the religious are not “a breed apart,” but rather that while extreme secularists and religionists may be in opposition, the broad mainstream of American culture is shared by moderates.²⁵ Thus, the first thing a strong-open secularity should do is avoid the expectation of intractability. There is nothing inherent in an American religious character that would prevent agreement on limiting the role of religion in public schools. As Joan DelFattore points out in *The Fourth R: Conflicts over Religion in America’s Public Schools*, the principle of equal access is popular because it appeals to many religious moderates who want to see schools that are open to religious practice but that do not prescribe a particular form.²⁶ In this case, a strong-

23 Gould, Stephen Jay, 1999, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (London, UK: Jonathan Cape, 2001).

24 Fish, Stanley, 1996, “Why We Can’t All Just Get Along,” *First Things* 60: 18-26.

25 Wolfe, Alan, 2003, *The Transformation of American Politics: How We Actually Live Our Faith* (New York, NY: Free Press).

26 DelFattore, Joan, 2004, *The Fourth R: Conflicts over Religion in America’s Public Schools* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), p. 310.

open secular could agree – equal access is open to religion but also allows for strong proponents of secularity to initiate student groups if they wish. Equal access does not violate the establishment clause of the First Amendment, because it neither establishes but equally does not prohibit the free exercise of religion. Thus, strong-open secular and religious people can come together to defend it against opposition by both secularist and religionist.

The issue of creationism in public schools, however, is a different matter. I agree that it is not science and has no place in science class, and that to have it there is to teach a religious doctrine and is thus establishment. This is not to say that proponents of creationism in its various guises – “creation science” or “intelligent design theory,” to name a few – have not presented some cogent critiques of science education. One should base science curricula on theories that are well received by the scientific community and are broadly in accord with known facts, but one can also teach that all science has room for improvement – a strong understanding, surely – without teaching creationism. However, to ban religion entirely from schools may be unfair. One could even argue that it is akin to establishing secularity, although I have consistently argued against there being a reified secularity, and thus it would be difficult to truly “establish” it. Nonetheless, despite equal access, not including an understanding of religion and its place in American life in school curricula may impair the truly free – in the sense of well-informed – exercise of religion. An overly-strong application of the idea of a “wall of separation” may result in an atmosphere that is unduly closed to the fact of religious belief.

Thus, I argue that a strong-open secularity would welcome classes in religion and ethics in public schools. From the legal standpoint, this is permissible. The Supreme Court found in *Stone v. Graham* (1980) that, although the Ten Commandments may not be posted in classrooms, as this would be a form of establishment, this does not preclude their use in classroom instruction. One could easily extend this principle to

allow other religious items, such as holy books, to figure in lesson plans. Useful here is the “Lemon test,” from *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), which asks whether government would appear to be endorsing religion by taking a given action. To teach about religions would pass the Lemon test, as they obviously play an important role in American public life and thus constitute an important social object of study. A class could also encourage students to reflect on their own religious or ethical beliefs, although the curriculum for such a class would have to be very well-designed to pass the Lemon test.

Because curricula are established by school boards across the country, each board would have to decide for itself what, if any, study of religion they should provide. Obviously, this would engender great debate. The strong secular should rightly be worried that some religious believers would attempt to guarantee that their truth be the one taught. However, the open secular would welcome open religious people – the same ones that support equal access because it admits but does not prescribe religion – into a forum where a mutual strong-open understanding could be built. Of course, this does not guarantee that all conflicts would be resolved easily or with goodwill, and in many districts religion would have to remain out of the curricula because people would not be able to agree on its presentation. However, one should not assume that this would be the case. Moreover, if creationism represents a “back door” through which extremists try to bring religion into schools, by opening the “front door” strong-open seculars would do much to welcome moderate religious people who could then argue against such extremists. This possibility is the most basic advantage of the strong-open position.

Future Exploration

In Peace Research

Indeed, the primary argument on which the above analyses rest is that by opening secularity to the broader currents of any religion with which it appears to be in conflict, one can reach out to moderates. Although they may come to it by their own beliefs,

these moderates are willing to work together for a peaceful resolution. This openness still requires a fair amount of strength – it is to be found by upholding, not denying, one’s own core beliefs. Throughout, I have supported this argument with more detailed research done and case studies reported upon by others. On the one hand, where I engaged with various theories about the role of religion in conflict, my analysis stands on its theoretical merits. This is entirely proper, as my original intent was to address the cognitive frames of reference within which seculars view the role of religion in conflict. However, while the case-by-case evidence I presented is compelling when viewed in the strong-open way outlined here, it is often circumstantial. There are relatively few sources that treat, concretely, the connection between how one approaches an opponent and how that opponent may react. While theoretical analysis is important, the next step in peace research on this topic is to ground this analysis on more practical research.

The first and most important question to ask is whether or not new evidence supports the basic premise. A useful method to use to answer this would be akin to that employed by Ashutosh Varshney in *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*,²⁷ which I discussed in previous chapter. By taking pairs of demographically similar cities, with one that had experienced ethnic conflict and one and that had not, Varshney essentially controlled for as many variables as possible to ascertain which societal characteristics did influence conflict. Similarly, one could research demographically similar groups, where the chief difference is the absence or presence of religious conflict, and ask whether strong-open belief – on the part of the religious or seculars – was the most explanatory factor. An application of Michael Agar’s strip/schema analysis,²⁸ from the third chapter, could help refine the argument. Taking, for example, the schema that a strong-open secular approach benefits strong-open religious people, or vice versa, and fosters connection and cooperation between the two groups, strips or examples in which this is not the case

27 Varshney, Ashutosh, 2002, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).

28 Agar, Michael H., 1986, *Speaking of Ethnography* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage), esp. pp. 20-39.

demand modification of the schema. Such modifications may point to specific conditions that must be met for strong-open belief to work. More refinement of understanding is not only theoretically sound, but is also more useful in devising recommendations for peacemaking practice.

To move to research of peacemaking practice is also to move from investigating correlation to investigating causation. Any study of different groups, no matter how demographically alike, can only highlight connections between the presence of strong-open actors or methods and an effect on violent conflict. Only evidence garnered from the introduction of such actors or methods into a given conflict can concretely demonstrate that they were primarily responsible for any peacemaking that occurred. Such an introduction could be unconscious – the parties need not self-identify as strong-open – or planned, but it is only by studying the presence of strong-open secularity where it had not figured before that one could understand its effects. However, researching peacemaking practice also necessarily involves a number of other elements of peace studies – methods of understanding conflict, conflict resolution techniques, and so on. Given that one can apply the broader concepts of strength and openness in any number of ways to peace studies, further research in practical peacemaking need not focus specifically on strong-open secularity or religiosity. Rather, it can explore the role a strong-open theoretical perspective can play in any peacemaking. I began this process in the third chapter with a theoretical comparison of strength and openness as understood in the religion and conflict literature on the one hand and integral theory and critical realism on the other. The latter theory has certainly begun to feature in peace thinking,²⁹ and the former likely will with time, so the most pertinent question to address

29 Not least through the work of my colleagues Veronique Dudouet and Connie Scanlon at the Department of Peace Studies in Bradford. Roy Bhaskar, the leading philosopher of critical realism, currently holds a guest professorship at the Centre for Peace Studies, University of Tromsø, Norway (see the CPS “People” page at <uit.no/cps/3325/> (as on 25 Jan. 2005)). For publications, see: Patomäki, Heikki, 2001, “The Challenge of Critical Theories: Peace Research at the Start of the New Century,” *Journal of Peace Research* 38(6): 723–737. However, although Patomaki and others have written works on critical realism and international relations, no one has yet produced a thesis-length treatment specifically on critical realism and peace.

is the benefit such abstract theories can bring to practical peacemaking.

One element of this “theory versus practice debate” that I find to be particularly important, and to which I have alluded in this thesis, is the applicability of strong-open thinking to conflicts at different levels. My analysis has largely been at the social level. At that level, an understanding of strong-open secularity best equips one to interact with religious groups as a whole, and it also encourages the development of strong-open religious people. However, that this thesis focuses on the societal level does not mean that such theoretical work is not applicable on smaller scales. For one, many points, such as increasing literacy both of one’s own beliefs and those of others, are easily adopted by individuals or small groups. Moreover, when it comes to interacting with an individual or small group, I have suggested that, because there will always be intransigent opponents with whom one will not be able to communicate, the most effective strategy is broadening one’s scope. By seeking out adherents of the same belief system as the opponent, but with whom one can communicate, if only in part, one can seek alternative avenues of communication. Further research could expand the scope and practicality of suggestions that, like this one, apply on smaller scales.

A related question is: who speaks for secularity in smaller-scale conflict? From the first example outlined earlier in this chapter, in the war on terror, one can easily identify “seculars” – policy makers and analysts – because foreign-policymaking is largely a secular business. However, what about the role of seculars at the local, domestic level, as on school boards from the second example? Likewise, in interreligious affirmations or events, to what extent should “nonreligion” be represented and who should do so? From the second chapter, I have specifically avoided treating secularity as an entity comparable to religion. In particular, this is due to the lack of figures who, by institutional position or even through authorship of widely acclaimed texts, can claim to define what secularity, as a whole, entails. Thus, I would avoid specifically using identifiers such as “atheist” or “Bright” to prove that someone represents seculars. This

thesis can not provide an answer because it has largely been addressed to people who already understand themselves to be seculars, exploring what a strong-open attitude would entail in established secularity. Getting religious people to see one as a secular, or finding agreement among seculars on who would make an adequate representative should such a need arise, is another matter. It would be both a theoretical and a practical exercise to explore this problem.

And in Philosophy

The question of who speaks for secularity brings us to a set of more purely philosophical issues that can also provide worthwhile directions for future research. While such research would surely have implications for further peace studies work in religion, secularity, and conflict, their more abstract, theoretical nature leads me to regard them as more “pure” than “applied” philosophy. The first issue relates to the representation of seculars in interreligious affairs. This leads to the question, can seculars *not* be represented there? To not include them would be to deny Fish’s argument as I presented it in the seventh chapter, that there can be no foundational belief against which one can measure other beliefs. Seculars, too, believe as they do for identifiable reasons. For example, a secular may make an argument based on the rigor of rational logic to promote such belief, or point to the efficacy of modern science and technology as grounds for the utility of secular views. Moreover, the concerns of secular thinkers must eventually intersect with those traditionally regarded as aspects of religion, such as ethics. In terms of whether or not people “believe” and what implications their beliefs have, then, there is no good reason to differentiate secular and religious. That is not to say that there are not other reasons to do so. In a largely secular culture, religious people may wish to seek common ground in a specifically *inter-religious* group. Moreover, the many ways in which secularity and religious belief differ are adequate markers for defining an interreligious group. Religions tend to be more organized, and thus have organizational interests that an interreligious group could

address, for instance. Nonetheless, when seeking to bridge gaps between belief systems or to discuss the way in which beliefs inform ethical concerns, it would behoove people to include someone conversant in secular thought.

It would also be worth continuing to explore the ways in which forms of secularity differ from one another, beyond the strong-open typology presented in this thesis. For instance, despite my rejection of understandings that equate secular belief systems with religion, it is possible to use the metaphor to explore secularity. One could analyze more-organized forms, which I have generally equated with secularist, versus less-organized ones. Such an analysis could either give a different perspective on secularity itself or foster an understanding of the role of organization in belief systems more generally. Moreover, recalling Nandini Sundar's caution from the second chapter, further study should compare Western and non-Western secularities. Her point was a caveat to this thesis – the history of secularity differs enough between the West and, in this case, India that it would be unwise to equate the two without further analysis. Thus, in the historical discussion, the analysis, and the cases, I have focused on Western secularity and its responses to religion within and outside the West. That leaves open a range of questions: have different secularities arisen out of different historical and social contexts? How do they compare to the Western secularity I identified in the fourth chapter, which stems from the European Renaissance and Enlightenment? To what extent do the concepts drawn from this thesis apply outside of that secularity?

A related set of questions arises when one considers the possibility of secularity developing where it has not done so yet. Given the contemporary world stage, the development of an Islamic secularity is a hot issue. I hold, with Katerina Dalacoura and others, that Islamic thought is amenable to both moderation and modernization, should Muslim moderates be given the intellectual space to develop it.³⁰ However, to the extent that the religious history of the West can be held as a model, would not that

30 Dalacoura, Katerina, 2003, *Islam, Liberalism, and Human Rights: Implications for International Relations*, 2nd ed. (1st 1998) (London, UK: I.B. Tauris).

development spur the creation of an Islamic approach to secularity? In the West, early scientists did not envision their work as a break from Christianity, but by the Enlightenment an increasing number of thinkers had begun to identify with the nonreligious modes of understanding of the Renaissance and Scientific Revolution, and thus secularity was born. This does not mean that modernization must destroy religion, and the history of the West shows that it need not, but for modernization to occur, the growth of secularity is perhaps inevitable. Indeed, a much better way to form the question is, to what extent has this already happened in the Islamic world? Are there, as yet, identifiably Islamic secularities? Addressing these questions – the relationship of religion and secularity as beliefs, and the relationship between various forms of secularity – is firstly a philosophical and sociological task. However, given that religion and belief will continue to be a major factor in conflict, the answers found will undoubtedly influence peace studies.

The most fundamental philosophical issue that one could develop out of this thesis concerns that which I bracketed first – the holy or divine. I initially bracketed this to give this thesis a manageable scope, but any conversation of substance between religious and secular will eventually consider such topics. Of course, that one identifies as a secular does not mean one has not considered questions that pertain to the sacred. It was N.J. Demerath's and Conrad Ostwalt's position, in the second chapter, that secularization could actually entail the development of sacred understandings outside of traditionally religious domains. Likewise, modern religious thought may contain much that appeals to seculars. Given the flexibility of prototype theory as a method of categorization, also from the second chapter, one can propose definitions for the two that allow them to share certain tenets. Indeed, to take a strong-open secular response to religion means that one must seriously consider where the two overlap, and not only where they differ.

I put aside such considerations in the first chapter to analyze the nature of a relatively

discrete secularity and its relation to peacemaking. However, the above questions still remain. This is a third possible meaning of “rethinking secular and sacred” – beyond rethinking what secularity might mean and how it and religion relate to one another, rethinking may entail developing an appreciation for the common ground of secularity and religion in relation to belief about the sacred. Indeed, one may heed Kurt Gödel’s prescription, as described in the previous chapter, to consider points normally considered theological in as much as they may have consequences amenable to scientific investigation.³¹ By doing so, one may begin to perceive scientific and theological explorations less as Stephen Jay Gould’s nonoverlapping magisteria and more as alternate means of approaching a shared reality.

This is not to say that scientific investigation can “prove” theological conclusions, or vice versa – indeed, any proper study will refine one’s understanding of what secularity and religion can and can not say about one another. Rather, beyond their different outward forms, both religion and secularity are human experiences. On the experience of contemplating the divine, early last century Rudolph Otto coined the term *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. In R. Scott Appleby’s terms, this denotes that “the encounter with the sacred is always a dialectical experience of mystery (*mysterium*): the feeling of dread evoked by its overpowering and uncontrollable presence (*tremendum*) comes bound up together with feelings of awe, wonder, and fascination (*fascinans*).”³² One should consider, then, the opening lines of Carl Sagan’s popularization of science, *Cosmos*: “The Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be. Our feeblest contemplations of the Cosmos stir us – there is a tingling in the spine, a catch in the voice, a faint sensation, as if a distant memory, of falling from a great height. We know we are in the presence of the greatest of mysteries.”³³ While Sagan’s words reflect the

31 Gierer, Alfred, 1997, “Gödel Meets Carnap: A Prototypical Discourse on Science and Religion,” *Zygon* 32(2): 207-217.

32 Appleby, R. Scott, 2000, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield), p. 28.

33 Sagan, Carl, 1980, *Cosmos* (New York, NY: Random House), p. 4. This passage also opened the Public Broadcasting Service television series *Cosmos*, released the same year.

secular tendency to circumscribe felt experience in favor of detached observation, he is clearly describing a mystery both tremendous and fascinating. In the face of mystery, perhaps seculars and the religious can come together in an appreciation of all that they, together, do not know, and also that all modes of understanding start with wonder. This could lead people toward what Johann Galtung would have called “soft secularity” as well as “soft religion,” where in the experience of mystery the divisions that engender or sustain violence fall away.

Conclusion

However, that is material for not just one but several other theses, and those in several different disciplines. Moreover, I did not embark on such an exploration specifically because I wanted this thesis to appeal to as wide a range of seculars as possible, save those who reject even interacting *with* religion without further consideration. In the first chapter, although I noted Galtung’s description of soft religion, I favored an analysis involving strength and openness because the mystical experience Galtung related to softness is not shared by all believers. Strong-open religion, on the other hand, can apply to what in Galtung’s terms would be hard, formalized belief. Indeed, perhaps it is strength and openness in hard religious belief that lay the foundation for softness there. Similarly, Sagan’s near-mystical description of the wonder that leads people to investigate the Cosmos is not shared by all seculars, so it would be foolish to base a peacemaking approach on it. Such evocation of mystery may lead some seculars to appreciate mystical beliefs, but it is better to encourage “hard” seculars to develop within their own strongly-held understanding the openness to critically engage with religion. If, from this, softness develops, so much the better, but peace founded on strong-open, if hard, cooperation is much more readily achievable.

This chapter has outlined possible applications, both in practical terms and in research suggestions, of strong-open secularity. The fundamental idea is that by combining the best elements of the secularist, liberal, and postmodern forms of

secularity one can best address conflict where religion is an element. The idea of strong-open religion, developed in the first chapter, thus finds a partner in secularity, a worldview generally not included in the literature on “religious conflict.” That there exists such a worldview was the subject of the second chapter, and I supplemented this with the historical narration in the fourth chapter. The balance of this thesis laid out a theoretical approach to strength and openness and then analyzed secularity in these terms, to describe, by the end, strong-open secularity. The next step, as outlined in this chapter, is to explore ways to apply this new mode of understanding to conflicts where worldview – secular, religious, or both – is an element.*

* Not cited but useful in this chapter was: Marzilli, Alan, 2004, *Religion in Public Schools*, “Point Counterpoint” series (Philadelphia, PA: Chelsea House).